

Review of *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* by Robert McRuer (NYU Press)

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ABSTRACT In his new book *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, Robert McRuer offers his notion of "crip time" as an analytic through which we may critique the spatio-temporalities of austerity, late capitalism, and the cultural logic of neoliberalism. McRuer's position is that disability is at the core of a global politics of austerity and of neoliberalism. What does it mean that disability is central to a global politics of austerity? For McRuer, it means that thinking about austerity through "crip time" can highlight an ongoing politics of representation of disability. That is, neoliberalism actively produces certain ways of being disabled that are conducive to its continued operation. But, "crip time" points to the ways in which this politics of representation does not fully capture disability. Disability exceeds austerity and neoliberalism. *Crip Times*, then, offers a critical examination of how disability is represented within the cultural logic of neoliberalism. At the same time, McRuer cautions against, as some past projects in disability and queer theory have done, fully rejecting or embracing the politics of identity, representation, and rights.

KEYWORDS austerity, disability, disability studies, globalization, neoliberalism, resistance

Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance. By Robert McRuer. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 233 pp. (hardcover) ISBN: 9781479826315. US List: \$89 (paperback) ISBN: 9781479874156. US List: \$30.

In his new book *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, Robert McRuer offers his notion of "crip time" as an analytic through which to critique the spatio-temporalities of austerity, late capitalism, and the cultural logic of neoliberalism. McRuer's position is that disability is at the core of a global politics of austerity and of neoliberalism. What does it mean that disability is central to a global politics of austerity? For McRuer, it means that thinking about austerity through "crip time" can highlight an ongoing politics of representation of disability. That is, neoliberalism actively produces certain ways of being disabled that are conducive to its continued operation. But, "crip time" also points to the ways in which this politics of representation does not fully capture disability. Disability exceeds austerity and neoliberalism. *Crip Times*, then, offers a critical examination of how disability is represented within the cultural logic of neoliberalism. At the same time, McRuer cautions against, as some past projects in disability and queer theory have done, fully rejecting or embracing the politics of identity, representation, and rights.

The central argument of *Crip Times* is that the construction and implementation of austerity as a policy and as a material reality is dependent upon certain representations and materializations of disability. Furthermore, McRuer argues that this co-productive

relationship between austerity and disability has, thus far, been undertheorized. Thus, *Crip Times* offers a rich theorization of the ways in which disability is central to a global politics of austerity. Austerity privileges a subject that is able-bodied and autonomous. The subjects of austerity can be held responsible for all of their choices and are presumed to deserve its harsh and precarious policies (including budget cuts, risk assumption, poor health conditions, flexible work, and later retirement, etc.), if they fail to compete. McRuer shows that disability and the disabled function as a way for a neoliberal state to justify austerity measures. That is, by using anti-disability rhetoric, such as characterizing individuals who ask for help as "scroungers," "spongers," and "shirkers," or by embracing David Cameron's "Broken Britain" or Margaret Thatcher's rhetoric of aspiration, neoliberalism makes clear that economic and social problems are individual and not systemic.

Through his focus on the United Kingdom, in particular on the Cameron years, McRuer makes strange, or—in his words—*crips* the ways in which disability is generally defined in disability studies, the media, and the state. The individuals that are understood to be scroungers, spongers, and shirkers, while not immediately intelligible as disabled, as McRuer argues, have in many ways been disabled by austerity measures. Or they are understood as innately inferior because of their failure to compete successfully in a market space, and thus they are represented as disabled. McRuer engages past and current work in queer and disability theory—including J. Jack Halberstam, Julie Livingston, Jasbir K. Puar, Alison Kafer, Kevin Floyd, Lisa Duggan, and Anne Finger—drawing from their denaturalization of able-bodied and heteronormative discourses, and from their theorizations of alternative political and economic imaginings of capitalism and neoliberalism. McRuer correspondingly offers a "crip" reading of disability within the cultural logic of neoliberalism across four chapters, each focusing on disability, and each centered around one of the following key concepts: dispossession, resistance, displacement, and aspiration.

Each chapter cripes one of these key concepts by breaking it down, twisting it, or defamiliarizing it. For example, in Chapter 1, McRuer characterizes what neoliberalism does with and to disability as an "austerity of representation." He suggests that modes of neoliberal dispossession, such as stealing and remaking queer as well as disabled identities, can be counter-posed against a critically crip dispossession that may resist austerity. An "austerity of representation" refers to the ways in which neoliberalism produces and allows for certain representations of disability, such as inspiration-porn, in order to hide the negative effects of certain policies and to detract attention away from activism. McRuer focuses in particular on "This Is What Disability Looks Like," an activist campaign that, for McRuer, offers a prime example of critically crip dispossession through its multivalent, excessive, and explicit or "pornographic" images of people with disabilities. It is in this campaign's "potentiality and sociality" that "This Is What Disability Looks Like" offers us a critically crip dispossession. Put differently, the future and present potential of "This Is What Disability Looks Like" to resist deadened representations of disability cannot be fully foreclosed by an austerity of representation. In each chapter that follows, McRuer engages in textual analyses of dominant neoliberal representations of disability and "emergent activist and artistic languages" (49). Moving back and forth between dominant neoliberal representations and these micro-level modes of resistance, McRuer shows that "emergent activist and artistic languages" (49) function, in part, by moving with and against neoliberalism's austerity of representation.

Part of the strength of this book is its demonstration of how crippling disability, austerity, and resistance makes it more difficult for neoliberalism to perpetuate itself. In other words, McRuer shows that neoliberalism, in part, functions through its ability to naturalize itself, to make it seem like it has always been the dominant social and cultural system. Neoliberalism is especially good at absorbing potential threats, including radical political and ontological forces. *Crip Times* does in the end deal with the current harsh times of neoliberalism and its austerity measures by considering the significance of resistance, and its contemporary forms. For readers familiar with McRuer's contributions to queer disability studies, the arguments presented in *Crip Times* fit nicely within his crip theory, as this text expands upon the interdisciplinary and intersectional methods of examining disability, ability, and culture that he has developed in previous works. *Crip Times* is an important contribution to the field because it offers a powerful corrective to the malaise of capitalist realism. While its usefulness extends beyond one particular discipline, scholars and activists in interdisciplinary programs, women and gender studies programs, political theory, and English will find it particularly useful.

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Caroline Alphin is an Instructor in the Department of English at Radford University. She received her doctorate in ASPECT: The Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought, an interdisciplinary program at Virginia Tech. Her recent publications have appeared in journals like *Theory and Event* and *SPECTRA*. Her research interests include accelerationism, American neoliberalism, the everyday practices of neoliberal subjects, and critiques of intensity and resilience.

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